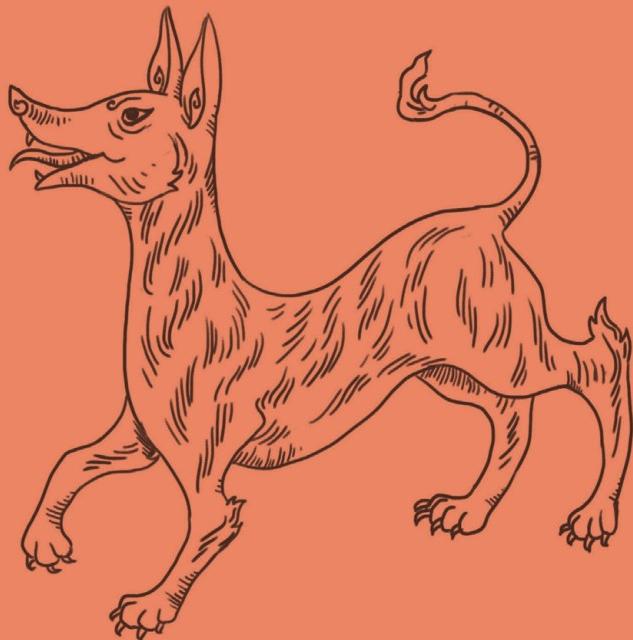


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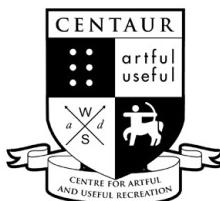
ANDJANG

THE QUEEN ON DOG MOUNTAIN

A THOUSAND THOUSAND ISLANDS

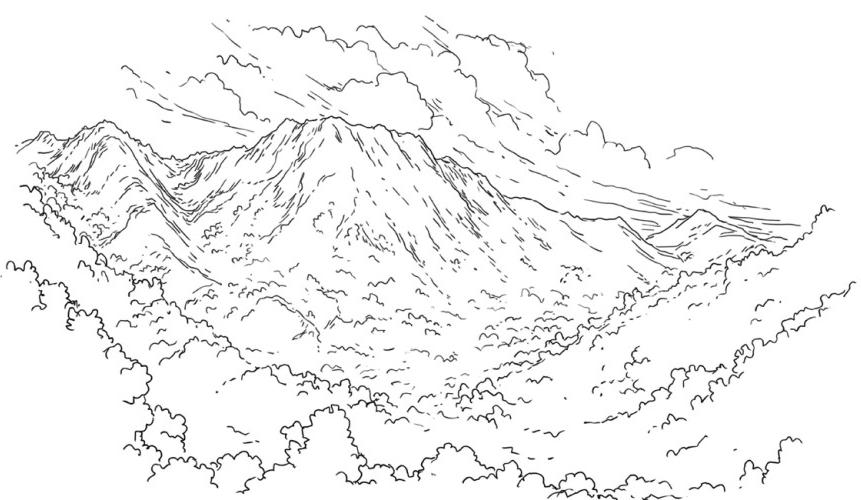
ANDJANG

THE QUEEN ON DOG MOUNTAIN



TEXT ZEDECK SIEW
ILLUSTRATIONS MUNKAO

A THOUSAND THOUSAND ISLANDS



THREE DAYS, UP A SWITCH-BACKING TRACK

Silk strips on a teak gateway. Drifting gauzily with the wind. Inwards, at first. Then out. In again. And out. The breeze keeps shifting. Breathing.



RUMOURS FROM ANDJANG



Never totally true. Never totally false, too:

- 1 "Witchery in the blood. They can buy curses off you. Not serious ones. Only things like pox or rashes. They like buying those, not sure why."
- 2 "Looking at the Queen is forbidden. A hag, maybe, or a too-beautiful-for-mortals type deal. Either way, a portrait will be worth big money."
- 3 "Old racing dogs, it's taboo to put them down. But bad luck to keep them around. So owners send them to the Mountain. It's a dog heaven."
- 4 "Those highland folk never smile. Know why? Hiding their fangs. All blood-suckers, those highland folk! If they smile -- better watch out!"
- 5 "There's gold in those hills. That's why they do well, up there. They don't flaunt it, though. Don't want inspectors from the Yellow Temple."
- 6 "Pay attention and you'll notice: no graveyards. They dump their dead into paddy fields. One body, one terrace. It's why their rice is so rich."
- 7 "Queen? Bullshit. They just don't want lowlander princes sniffing about. That palace has been abandoned for years. And still full of treasure."
- 8 "They are all indoors by sundown, and their windows shut tight. One night somebody called my name, from outside. My host shushed me."
- 9 "The air is cool, the harvest rich, the villagers kind. "But -- " Your informant stutters. Looks confused. As if she forgot she'd been talking.
- 10 Nothing. Nothing whatsoever. People pretend not to hear your questions. They ghost you after. Nobody will even speak Andjang's name.

RISALA'S TRAIN

Cattle, three dozen, tied tail to nose ring. Risala took a herd up the Mountain last year. Her most profitable round-trip, ever.





QHULAN, DECREPIT KING

Jewelled belt, jewelled scabbard. But robbing him is a problem. Touch his sword and you gush blood from every orifice.

His sword thirsts. Tortures him. Shows him everybody they killed, together, over the years. His wife and her lover. The city of Sintra. The prince, his son. He whimpers in his sleep, and wakes screaming.

Qhulan will beg the Queen on the Mountain to take his sword. She can keep it fed, maybe. Then he can be free. Then he can die, finally.



HARIHANI, EXILED HEIR

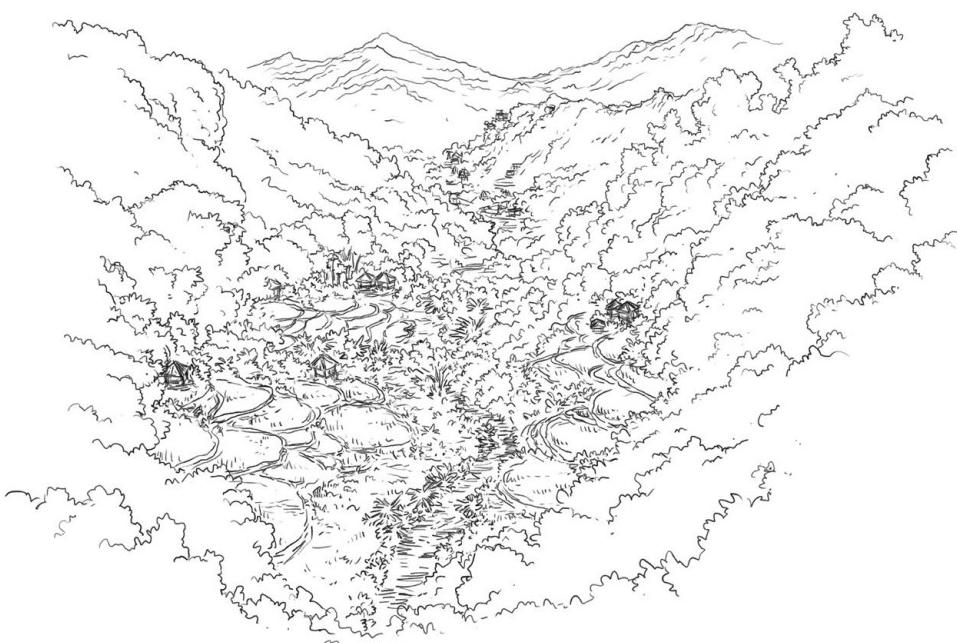
Jewelled necklace, glaring eyes. As if daring you to mess with her. Good at the gale art: wind obeys her spoken word.

Not so good at politics. Her father was mayor of Silangga. When he died, her uncle seized the manor. Harihani cannot retake it herself. Knows Andjang royals have dread sorceries, and wants their backing.

The Queen will refuse. But her children are unruly, and ambitious, and they wish host-countries of their own, to rule.

IKSO-DI

TYPICAL VILLAGE



In a valley like the fold between rolls of a plump belly.

Folk bend in flooded terraces, full of beet-red water. "It's the soil," they tell you. Rice seedlings grow lurid green.

No chickens or pets. No animal sounds, besides insects. There are cowsheds -- but unless a trader has been by, these are empty. Ploughs are hand ploughs, pushed by people-shaped rattan puppets.

PEOPLE OF ANDJANG

They live in raised houses. The space underneath is storage: sieves and threshing screens; palm-leaf mats and cooking pits.



Also:



- 1 Bolts of cotton and fine silk. A person-sized calabash mounted on a post, wearing a half-finished vest. He is a seamster.
- 2 Sickles leaning against a thatched workshop. The forge fire burns low. Only women are allowed in. She is a blacksmith.
- 3 A balance scale, big as a loading crane. Per-day rooms for visiting traders; porridge meals provided. They are a rice-seller.
- 4 He rehearses. Before you see him you hear him: feet stamp-stamp-stamping, the Mountain's heart, beating. He is a dancer.
- 5 Unguents for newborn babes; a meteoric-iron mallet to smash undead spirits. Midwives watch the boundary. She is a midwife.
- 6 Sealed earthen pots. Loud talk offends the wine spirits snoozing within. "They will curse you," she whispers. She is a vintner.
- 7 Wood shavings from a whittling knife. Each piece murmurs wordlessly. If burned they shriek in agony. He is a charm-carver.
- 8 Wildflowers rainbow the roof. Roots curtain the eaves, long and wispy. The sound of a pestle, pounding. They are a herbalist.
- 9 Rattan, woven into arms, two legs, a head -- a rattan puppet, in parts, still unspelled. She is a skilled disciple of the rattan art.
- 10 The outline of a dog, on a flag of white silk. The flag of Andjang. Jars, in a row, full of blood congealing. He is a bloodletter.

Here a pearl earring, there a gold anklet. Wealthier than you expect, for rubes. And thinner than you expect. They are all a little wan.

Look at this one:

- 1 Only ever stares past you. Can't focus, or doesn't want to.
- 2 Narcolepsy. Yawning mid-sentence, they keel over, asleep.
- 3 Tattooed scalp and eyebrows. Totally hairless, otherwise.
- 4 Always sweaty. To shake their hand is to hold a cold fish.
- 5 Always sniffling. If they stop blood leaks out their nostrils.
- 6 Vomit on their breath. When they leave this smell lingers.
- 7 Hard to understand. Their tongue looks like an ox's heart.
- 8 A dwarf. Has a complex. Hears insults in anything you say.
- 9 Fingerless on one hand. Irregular stumps, as if bitten off.
- 10 Hungry. Always eating. Literally never seen not chewing.

They have puncture scars on their inner elbows or necks. Spots where the bloodletter has put his needle.





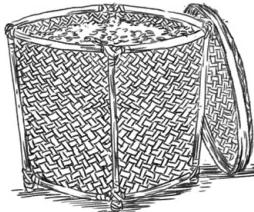
Something is up:

- 1 They have caught the eye of a princess. Serving her as consort would be the highest honour. Too bad consorts tend not to live out the year.
- 2 Their face erupts, extending a proboscis made of chitin. An assassin bug in human skin, hoping to catch one of Andjang's royal insects.
- 3 In love with a neighbour. This situation is hopeless -- neighbour-boy just doesn't swing that way. Not above using mind-control love potions.
- 4 They miss their dead wife. Plans to summon her spirit into a rattan puppet. Will mispronounce the ritual, and summon something else, instead.
- 5 Afraid of needles. They will pay you for your blood. "Don't tell anybody," they say. Dodging the tithe is very taboo; a breach of community trust.
- 6 Genial and generous when you meet them in the village. You meet them again, on the trail down the Mountain. Leading a gang of bandits.
- 7 Kicking their step-son. The boy is a bastard, a vagrant's get. "Please take me with you!" the boy begs. To leave he needs the Queen's consent.
- 8 Bleeding from multiple bites. They were attacked by a swarm of babies, in the forest. Fleeing, their daughter tripped, fell. She was left behind.
- 9 Their philtrum splits. Three jaws twist themselves into a trefoil arrangement. An agent of the Leech Temple. A spy, sabotaging rival parasites.
- 10 Their brother was killed by a prince. Now they spit whenever anybody mentions the royal family. Now they are secretly brewing firebombs.

Once a month the village is deserted. Rattan puppets wait, motionless.

TRADE GOODS OF ANDJANG

Farmers, they want city things: whitesmith goods, wine, fabrics. And livestock. They always take livestock. And slaves.



BLACK RICE

Aromatic, chewy, notes of peanut and the meatier mushrooms. Trending as a super-food; five baskets are a worth a whole bullock.

Lowlander aristos claim it boosts energy and blood circulation. Maybe? A diet of Andjang rice means you heal at double the usual rate.



RED LOAM

Something in the soil feeds sprouting things. Earth freshly turned a half-hour ago is already lichenous, furry with new grass.

This virtue may be transplanted. Add a twelve-year-old's weight in Mountain loam into your field or orchard. Its next crop cannot fail.



RATTAN PUPPET

Made by weaving together spirit-stuff and palm wood. With the final spell said, a fruit buds from the top of its head.

Whoever eats this fruit the puppet obeys. Only takes simple commands. Not quick or deft, but tires as a tree does -- which is never.

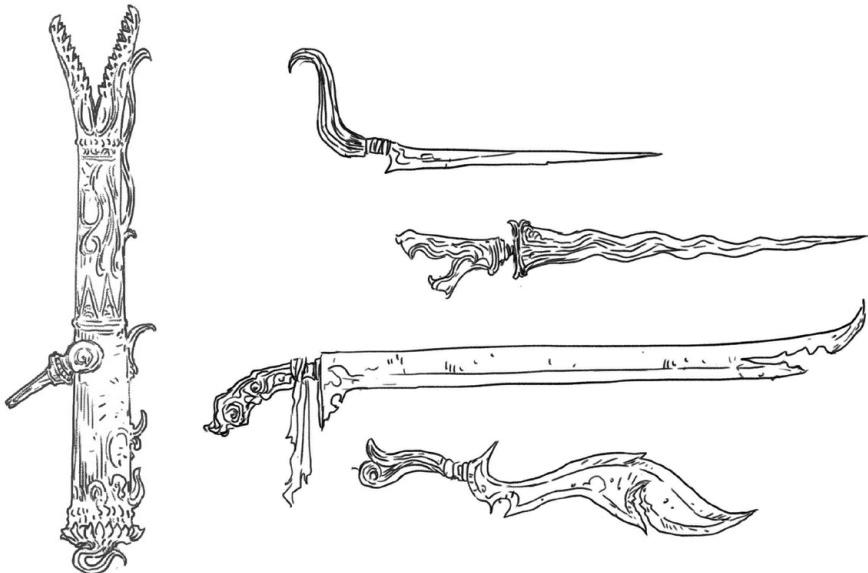
MAGIC WEAPONS OF ANDJANG

All killing tools wish to end in blood and death. Some settle for Andjang, where one of those is plenty.

They might be traded or stolen out of retirement. They are:



- 1 A dagger. Wavy, pattern-welded blade under a layer of rust.
- 2 A trident. Tines made from a monstrous creature's canines.
- 3 A whip. Cannot be wielded silently; cuts the air, screeching.
- 4 An axe. Handle long as your leg, worn to a shine from use.
- 5 A quiver of arrows. Twenty in total. Their shafts do not snap.
- 6 A hand-cannon. Muzzle-loading, meant to fire scattershot.



Some lodge with the peasants. These have a single power; roll a d6:

- 1 Vindictive. The injuries they make do not naturally knit.
- 2 Eager. They twist your aim towards the nearest living target.
- 3 Entitled. Every time they are wielded they take at least a life
- 4 Seductive. They compel potential victims -- closer, closer.
- 5 Loud. In battle, their screams discombobulate all present.
- 6 Jumpy. Once per combat, they leap as a person might.
- 7 Floaty. Capable of self-propelled flight, about as quick as a quadcopter drone.
- 8 Cranky. Drawn, they get heavier and heavier -- soon they are too heavy to lift.
- 9 Pranky. Enemies whose blood they taste in the same battle are body-swapped.
- 10 Magnanimous. The harm they do to others is converted into healing, for you.
- 11 Unforgiving. Any creature they wound dies on the night of the next full moon.
- 12 Indiscriminate. In their presence attacks always hit. Yours, everybody else's.
- 13 Gluttonous. They bite and drain blood from any creature that handles them.
- 14 Gossipy. They talk to inanimate objects, and may ply them for information.
- 15 Anxious. Sweating a flammable grease. The slightest spark sets them a-fire.
- 16 Overbearing. In their presence, weapons of the same kind droop like leaves.
- 17 Infuriating. The sight of them sets sentient beings off on rage-filled frenzies.
- 18 Blabby. Knows and points out the closest creature that means their bearer ill.
- 19 Cocksure. Blazes with a cold white light, illuminates even unnatural darkness.
- 20 Possessive. Only they are able to break your skin. Nothing, no one else can.



Greater weapons end up in the Queen's vault. These have more powers; roll a d6 and a d20.



THREE LAWS OF ANDJANG

PAY THE TITHE

Monthly, villagers parade to the palace. Banners and crimson umbrellas; trays of grain, roots, fruit. Jars of blood.

One pint for each child; two pints for adults. That is the tithe. A live sacrifice in lieu of your own blood may lighten your obligation -- but never replace it entirely.

All who pay the tithe are subjects. Killing or kidnapping a subject is stealing from the Queen's table, a sin punishable by death.

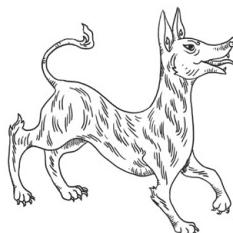


LOVE THE BOUNDARY

Megaliths dot the towns and trails. They bear the dog sigil, and mark Andjang's borders.

Treaties signed with various divinities mean that armies lose their way before they come within sight of these stones. Carnivorous beasts lose their senses. Wild spirits freeze.

Such protections are tied to the Queen's person, and dissolve if she is ever slain. "Praise the Queen," the locals say. "Long may she reign."



OFFER OBEISANCE

Andjang's princes and princesses enforce the law, and live above it. They are royalty. It is a sin to naysay their wishes.

Have a gift prepared. They love cutting-edge lowlander couture, innovative magic, and fresh meat. Meeting them empty-handed is a breach of etiquette; for your gaffe they demand redress in blood.

Audiences with the Queen may only be arranged by these, her sons and daughters.

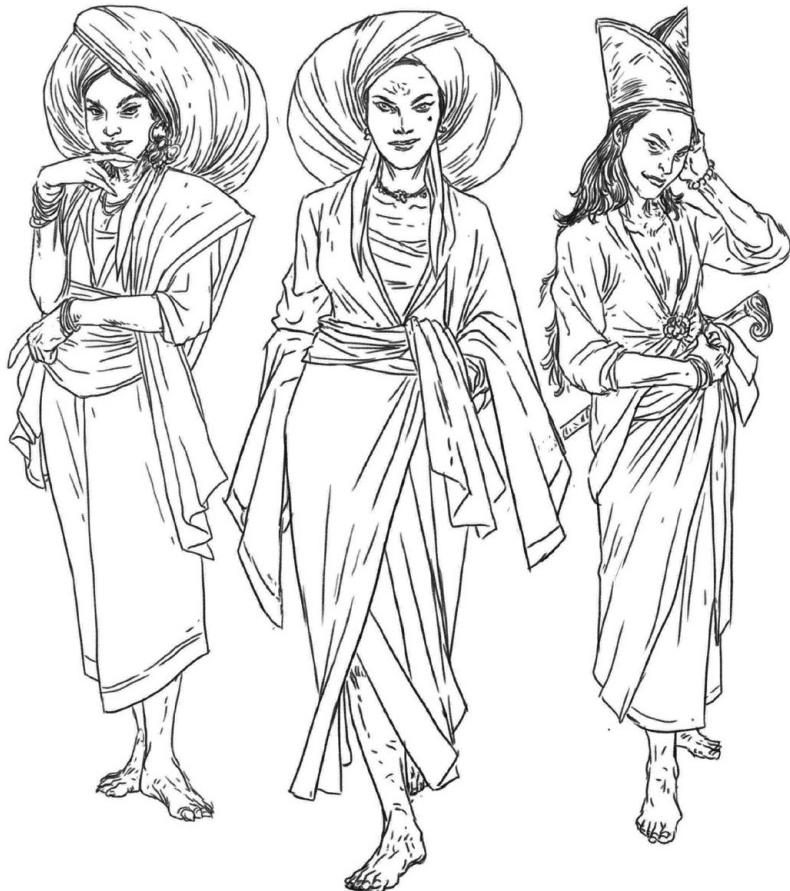


ROYALTY OF ANDJANG

Born by their dozens they are dumped in the forest to die. Fair game for any predator, they learn to stick together. They learn to pack-hunt wild pig. And tiger.

Eventually they hunt each other. They leave the forest -- scarred, alone. In Kamar-Di they take a name, and their station as royalty.

They never forget what the forest taught them.



Princes have high hats; they tend to be wiry. Princesses wear heavy turbans; they are light-skinned, and supple.

Roll three d6s. They also have:



- 1 Eyes that shine at night.
- 2 Teeth like a shark's maw.
- 3 A voice cloyingly cutesy.
- 4 A mole that moves about.
- 5 Hair tough as garrote wire.
- 6 A long and barbed tongue.

- 1 Milky sweat, mildly anaesthetic.
- 2 Skin enmeshed in purple veins.
- 3 Fingers ending in black talons.
- 4 A body stench, sour as vinegar.
- 5 A silent tread. Totally trackless.
- 6 Loud joints, constantly popping.

- 1 A tambour band. Matching the tempo to their master's emotional state.
- 2 Gold body paint. A servant, in tow, with bucket and brush, for touch-ups.
- 3 A tired human steed. They ride on his shoulders, like an overgrown child.
- 4 Too much jewellery. Bangles to their armpits. Earrings like grape bunches.
- 5 A cloud of scented talc. Hold your breath, or be caught in a sneezing fit.
- 6 Fresh scars, from a hunt. The carcass of a human-ish thing, trussed up.

If you glimpse the back of their heads, they have likely decided to eat you.



They have eldritch powers:



- 1 A detachable head. Scuttles about. Able to attach to the neck of any decapitated creature -- this is their new body.
- 2 A siren stare. Any creature she focuses on falls in love with her, temporarily unable to believe she means them harm.
- 3 Bodyguards. Eight in number, brains replaced with bladders of jellied blood, tuned to obey his telepathic instructions.
- 4 Once a day, a handclap that paralyzes all who hear it -- you fall over; birds drop from the sky. Paralysis lasts an hour.
- 5 Once a week, a lilting mantra. Said in full, it permanently turns an entire human body's worth of blood into pure gold.
- 6 Once a week, a guttural hex. Said in full, it creates a clone of its caster. Permanent, and as two-faced as the original.
- 7 Once a day, a fingersnap. A sharp crack, it breaks all limbs in a single target, within sight -- spider or tree or person.
- 8 Silk glands. From a spinneret on the nape of her neck she weaves webbing into snares and shirts, strong as steel.
- 9 A blinding song. Polyphonic, unearthly, it seems to come from everywhere. He is invisible to any creature listening.
- 10 A thought-stealing kiss. Their lips take your last twenty-four hours. They remember your yesterday. You forget.

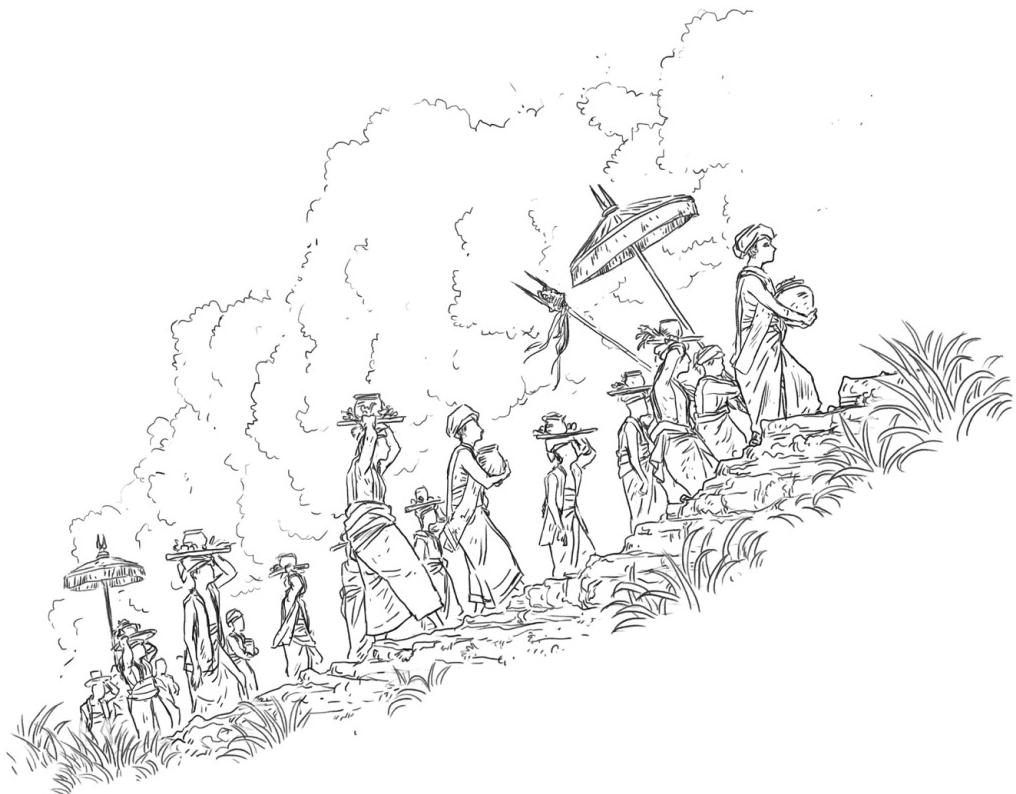


KAMAR-DI *PALACE TOWN*

Dawn mist lingers well into mid-day, and the nights feel like cold broth.

Only royalty and the servants of royalty live here. There are multi-storeyed manses, painted in too many colours. Some are fortified and barricaded against their neighbours. Royal siblings rarely get along.

The stepped path through town is well-worn; it leads up and further on.



THE PALACE

Clings to its crag. Compared to the pomp of town it seems a ruin: its roofs grassy; its walls a-bulge with mold; its windows missing shutters, and never more than dimly lit.





COURTYARD

On tithe days villagers line up here, taking turns to prostrate themselves in front of the Queen's dais. Her throne is a daybed.

Surrounded by potted plants. She talks to them; asks them questions. Use a Speak With Dead spell to hear their mewled responses. In these are the souls of her foes.

KITCHENS

One building is full of boiling pots and butchers' hooks. The other is a gaol, where live offerings and criminals are kept.

A man calls from a holding cell. "Hey, you! Help me!" This is Villu, a gem merchant. He tried to sell Jaza-Hi glass jewels. She will enjoy eating him.

CEMETERY

At least a hundred headstones, crowded closer together than a paddy crop. The Queen has outlived generations of royalty.

Bigger ones belong to kings and crown princesses. Summon a ghost by pouring blood on its grave. It hangs around for a night, chatty.



KING'S ROOMS

Every surface scrubbed or polished. Kawa-Hi does his own cleaning. "Servants are not thorough enough," he sniffs.

A rug hides the entrance to secret tunnels, passages, and crawl spaces. These riddle the entire complex. Kawa-Hi dug them himself.

TREASURE HOUSE

Bags of currency: silver, gold, sea-ivory. Get-out-of-jail-free seals from all the lowlander cities; Andjang has many favours to call in.

Also sentient weapons, clamped to their stands -- newcomers or recalcitrants Ragu-Lo has yet to browbeat into submission.



BANQUET HALL

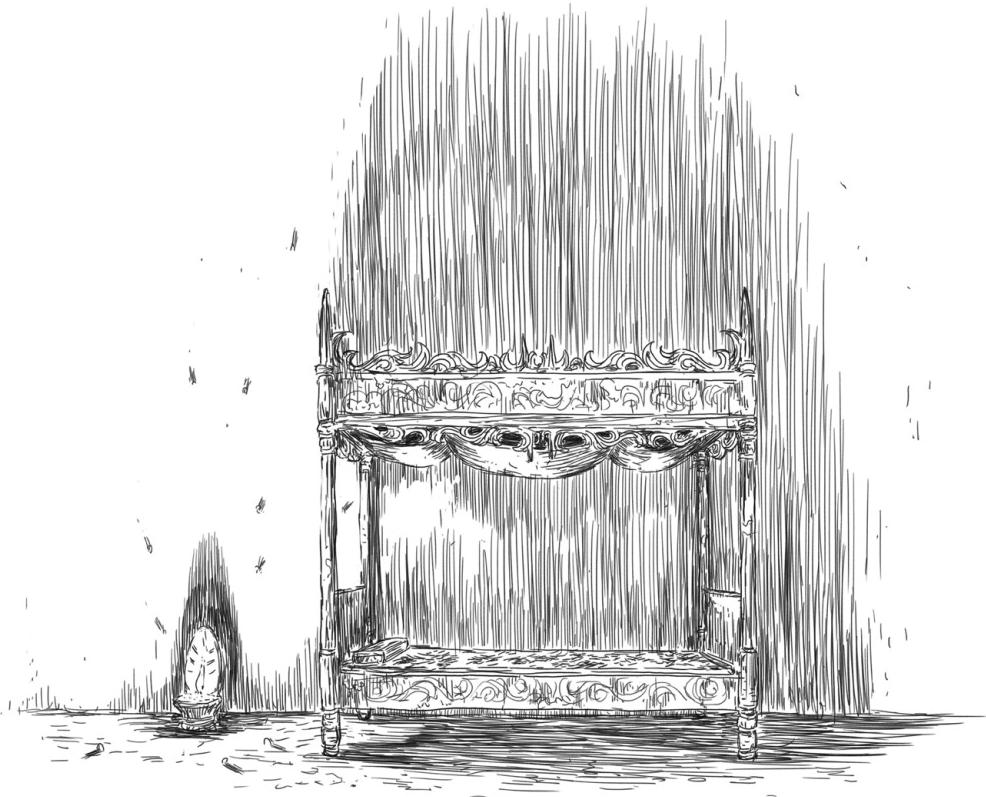
Rich meals of black tofu, red spinach stew -- raw meat. Always raw meat. Royals lick their plates clean.

Rooms on the upper floor are for servants. A cook, disfigured midwives, gardener eunuchs, a dozen children. All have a tattoo of a shut eye on their person.

GUEST ROOMS

Petitioners may wait days to see the Queen on the Mountain. Her guest rooms are bare. A thin mat on a teak bed-frame. Maybe a pillow. The door doesn't lock.

A bowl on a nightstand, under a brass faucet shaped like a hound's snout. Turn its handle and fresh blood comes out.



BIRDHOUSE

The floorboards are covered with cream-white splatter. You hear feathers whapping in the rafters. You see no birds.

Phantom birds! They are spies. Slurp their shit up and see what they see for twenty-four hours. At noon Ragu-Lo enters the birdhouse, holding a spatula, smacking his lips.

QUEEN'S BOUDOIR

Built into natural caves. The maproom is for affairs of state. The bedroom is where her handmaidens attend her. They are the daughters of village elders.

Her bath is open to the sky. Two pools: one, of water, fed by a natural spring; the other, of gore, fed by a brass god weeping blood.

GROTTO

A lake of blood. This is where the tithe ends up, where offerings are bled. Magic weapons ring its shore, blades touching the crimson liquid like deer tongues lapping water.

The pump that supplies the palace's faucets is a thorny brass phallus. Its mechanism makes a beating noise -- a pacing beast, maybe? Or a heartbeat.

The lake's surface quivers. How deep do these caverns go? Only the Queen knows.



PALACE ATMOSPHERE



Generally cold, damp-smelling, unsettling. The next door you enter, you find:

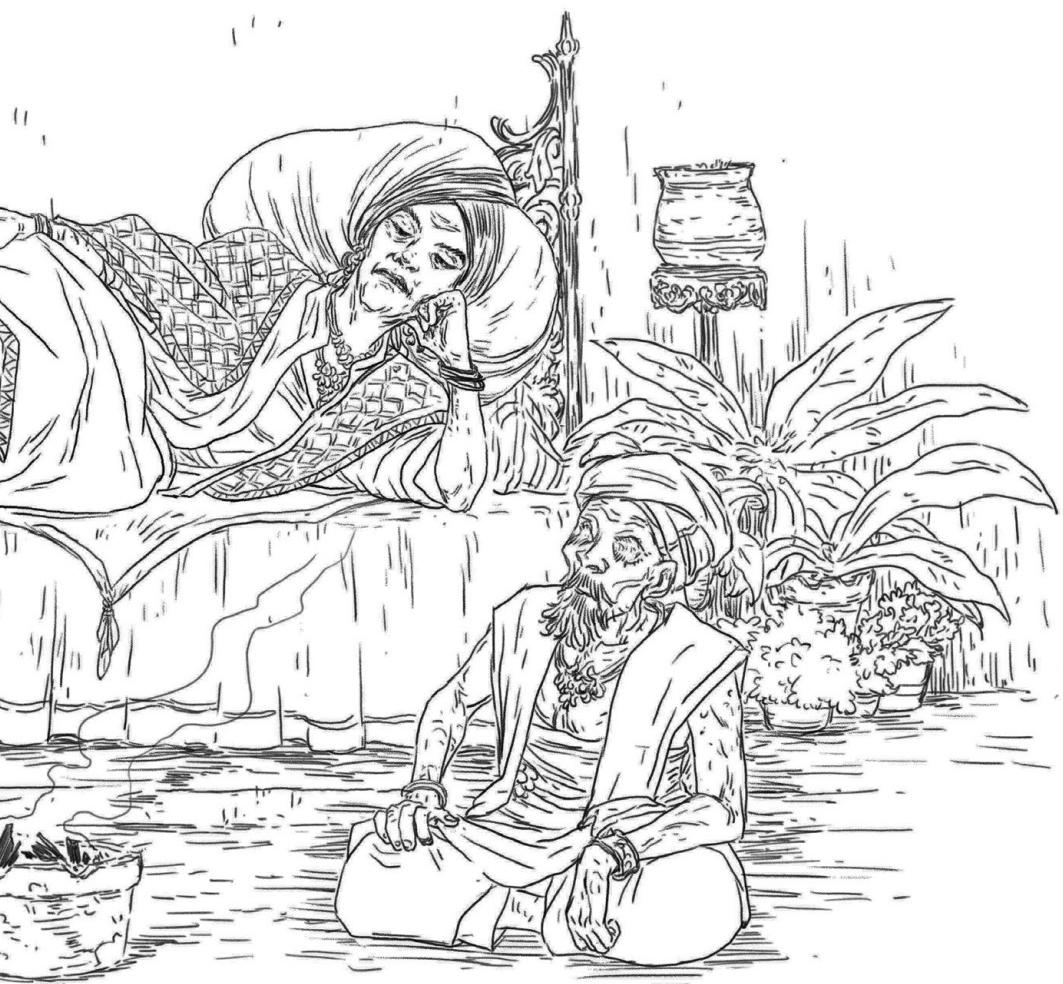


- 1 Your outbreaks are clouds of mist. These don't disappear, but drift towards the grotto.
- 2 In the floor or wall or ceiling -- a quick rhythmic knocking sound, plus heavy breathing.
- 3 Moisture not part of a living body freezes. Melts only when removed from the palace.

- 4 The playing shadow of an invisible insect swarm. Welts appear on your skin.
You itch.
- 5 Muttering. A small lamp gutters. Its wick repeats: “Burn burn burn burn burn
burn burn.”
- 6 A termite mound. Women who touch it get good luck for an hour. Men get
total disaster.
- 7 A child, open-eye tattoo on their forehead. Ask them about it? The eye shuts;
they bawl.
- 8 A baby. Bites, scuttles, hisses like a cat cornered. Fetch the servants, they’ll
shoo it out.
- 9 It is now night outside. You are thirsty, sweating, covered in scratches. You’ve
lost time.
- 10 You’ve come out a door in a different part of the complex. A one-time spatial
distortion.







THE COURT

The Queen delegates. Her minister governs. The crown princess leads martial matters. The king is for making babies.

KAWA-HI, PERVERT KING

In public Kawa-Hi's eyes are half-open, heavy with disinterest.

In private he is a voyeur. Remote scrying doesn't scratch his kink; he has to breathe your air. He could be watching you through a crack in the floor. And furiously wanking.

The Queen demands his absolute devotion. She would kill him if she found out. He will murder to make sure she doesn't.

JAZA-HI, CROWN PRINCESS

Manner as low and gruff as a snorting boar.

Andjang's most fearsome warrior. When a demon threatens the border, when a spat between royals gets too rowdy, the Queen sends Jaza-Hi in person.

Loyal, mainly because as eldest surviving daughter she is next in line to the throne. Her mother is old, and must abdicate soon. Surely?

RAGU-LO, LOYAL MINISTER

Not royalty. Pretends to be senile, if that offers any advantage.

Born with empty skin where his eyes should be. The Queen taught him sorcery, gave him high office. Ragu-Lo will never betray her.

May puppet the body of anyone wearing his shut-eye tattoo, wherever they are. He need only concentrate to take over. The shut eye opens.



THE QUEEN ON THE MOUNTAIN



Has nothing to prove. Languor informs her movements -- unless she senses a threat. Then she is lightning.

Knows more hexes than anyone present. Has total control over the blood in her grotto. It heals her, animates to obey her will. Takes human-shaped forms to fight you. Eels into your nostrils and drowns you.

Like the most successful tyrants, the Queen genuinely loves her country. She cares for its people. Wouldn't you, for the animals you own?



6 sided dice



10 sided dice



20 sided dice



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